measures to assess the factors that lead a person (P) to be attracted to another person (O). In the 1980s researchers turned their attention to the more intense sentiments and phenomena that occur within actual interpersonal relationships, and to the social context of various kinds of specific relationships. The majority of research started to focus on the "pulse" or quality of these interpersonal relationships and its link to processes inside (e.g., depression, physical health) and outside (e.g., work satisfaction, financial strain) the individual.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH

Even more recently, relationships have received considerable attention in sociology and the other social sciences. Research since 1980 illuminates several themes. First, an expanding body of literature demonstrates that interpersonal relationships are vital to the physical and mental health of individuals. Studies show that individuals are likely to suffer from depression, ill health, and other physical problems if they lack interpersonal relationships of high quantity and quality. Second, the current research emphasizes specific relational processes that are relevant at various stages of the life course of a relationship. A third new direction has been to concentrate on making the dyad the unit of analysis rather than the individual. This change is both methodological and conceptual and has become an important contribution. Fourth, given the prominence of symbolic interactionism in sociology, another new direction has been to apply symbolic interactionist concepts to the study of relationship well-being and stability. The self is created out of the interactions and feedback from others, and the relational context is even more salient for how individuals view themselves. The fifth new direction has been to examine the construction of meaning within relationships for relationship quality and stability. There is an acknowledgment that individuals may construct meanings of their relationships, based on the social context of that relationship and individual, which in turn has significant influence on individuals' evaluations and status of those relationships. Sixth, the larger environment and structural conditions that can be harmful or beneficial for a couple's well-being have been examined (e.g., social networks, race/ethnicity).

SEE ALSO: Dyad/Triad; Friendship: Interpersonal Aspects; Interaction; Marriage

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TERRI L. ORBUCH

intersectionality

An intersectionality framework emerged during the late 1980s with roots in socialist feminism, critical race and ethnic studies, and postcolonial feminisms. This evolving interdisciplinary body of theory and practice emphasizes the simultaneity of oppressions. Collins (2000: 18) asserts that "oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice." Within this framework "there are no gender relations per se, but only gender relations as constructed by and between classes, races, and cultures" (Harding 1991: 79). By focusing on how systems of inequality are cross-cutting this framework draws attention to differences among women (or among men) rather than simply differences between women and men. This tradition understands systems of oppression as grounded in relational power differentials. Men's domination is thus related to (and dependent upon) women's subordination and the status of poor women of color is related to (and dependent upon) the status of affluent white women. Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (1996) identify five basic assertions common to intersectionality approaches: the conceptualization of gender and race as structures and not simply individual traits, the rejection of an a priori assumption that women constitute a unified category, the existence of interlocking systems of inequality and oppression, the recognition of the interplay of social structure and human agency, and the necessity for historically specific, local analyses to understand interlocking inequalities.

Gender and race are understood as structures, discourses, or sets of enduring relations rather than simply individual characteristics. Gender and race are seen as social constructions rather than predetermined, transhistorical, biological or natural phenomena. The changing meanings of gender and racial categories across time and place substantiate the fluid, social character of gender and race.

The analytical category of "women" is not assumed to be a homogeneous, unified group of

individuals who experience a common oppression and not assumed prior to an investigation. Women's shared structural location as women is not sufficient for understanding their experiences of gender inequality. Mohanty et al. (1991: 58) asserts that "sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis."

An intersectionality perspective assumes that individuals' lives are embedded within and affected by interlocking systems of inequalities based on race, gender, class, and sexuality. Individuals occupy multiple and often contradictory status positions that simultaneously advantage and disadvantage their lives. This "matrix of domination," as described by Collins (2000), embraces a both/and model of inequalities rather than an additive model of inequalities or binary oppositions. Interlocking inequalities operate at a macro-level that refers to the connections between institutional and organizational structures of race, class, and gender and a micro-level that refers to how interactions between individuals and groups are shaped simultaneously by race, gender, and class structures. A woman's gendered experiences are always framed in the context of her racial and class locations. Using this multi-lens approach allows researchers to (1) ground scholarship on gender in the histories of racism, classism, imperialism, and nationalism; (2) highlight how status positions are relational such that positions of privilege and disadvantage are connected; and (3) understand consequential differences among women (or among men) rather than simply differences between women and men.

Intersectionality highlights the interplay of social structures and human agency and thus allows for social change. The focus is often on the strategies of creative resistance that women employ to survive and thrive in oppressive situations rather than emphasizing women's powerlessness and dependency on men. Intersectionality scholars do not simply examine overt, public political activity, but focus on the less visible politicized activities that are taken up by subordinated groups.

The basic assumptions of intersectionality necessitate the need for historically specific, local analyses that allow for the specification of the complexities of particular modes of structured power relations. It is through such analyses that theoretical categories can be generated from within the context being analyzed. Intersectionality scholars reject universalizing and ahistorical approaches that try to explain, for example, patriarchal organization for all places at all times.

SEE ALSO: Black Feminist Thought; Matrix of Domination; Outsider-Within; Third World and Postcolonial Feminisms/Subaltern; Womanism

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CYNTHIA FABRIZIO PELAK

intersexuality

Intersex refers to a variety of inborn conditions whereby an individual's sexual or reproductive anatomy varies from social expectations about "normal" male or female anatomy. Because the standards are arbitrary, "intersex" is not a discrete category – what counts as intersex depends upon who's counting. That said, about 1/2,000 babies is born with obvious enough differences to come to medical attention. This biological variation creates direct challenges to binary constructs of sex and gender and to the cultural institutional systems designed around assumptions that discrete sex categories naturally yield complementary gender roles and heterosexuality.

Individuals with intersex conditions entered the arena of gender and sexual identity politics with the formation of the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) in 1993. Building on strategies employed by gender and sexual minority rights movements of the late twentieth century, ISNA members have demanded an end to cosmetic genital surgery on infants, noting the absence of empirical evidence supporting the practice and ethical, medical, and human rights concerns (see the ISNA website, www.isna.org). Sex assignment at birth has critical legal and social implications including marital rights, certain constitutional protections, military service, athletic program participation, and leadership opportunities in religious organizations. People with intersex argue the existing medical treatment protocol must be changed to reduce the shame and secrecy around their condition and to allow people with "ambiguous genitalia" the right to make their own decisions about plastic surgeries.